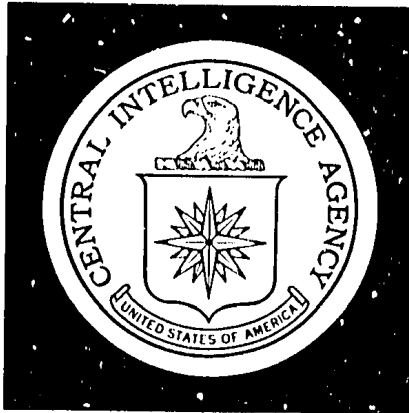


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Secret



OFFICE OF
NATIONAL ESTIMATES

MEMORANDUM

Indo-Pakistani Tensions

Secret

28 May 1971

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

28 May 1971

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Indo-Pakistani Tensions*

NOTE

SNIE 32-71, "Prospects for Pakistan", published on 12 April 1971, is still valid. However, in view of the rapid march of events in the subcontinent, it seems useful to update this assessment. The present paper assesses the apparently irrational quality of West Pakistani leadership, and the factors working for and against major Indo-Pakistani conflict.

* *This memorandum was prepared by the Office of National Estimates and coordinated within CIA.*

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THE SITUATION IN EAST BENGAL

1. The immensity of the human tragedy in East Bengal has become apparent. The West Pakistani army controls the cities and larger towns, or what is left of them. A good many residents of the capital city of Dacca have apparently fled, and the same seems to be true of the other urban centers. Most textile and jute mills (the principal industries) are working at about one-third of capacity, and some are not in operation. Rail and road transport is sporadic, unreliable and frequently cut by insurgents; the essential rail line between Dacca and Chittagong has been cut in a number of places, most notably on a long steel bridge which may take up to a year to repair.

2. Food, however, is the most critical problem, inasmuch as the east wing requires large foodgrains imports even under normal circumstances. In recent years such requirements have amounted to 1-2 million tons annually. Shipments to the East were stopped for a time during the hostilities and are now only slowly and partially resuming. There is no place to store any large new stocks of foodgrains, and in any case little can be moved inland from the ports. Those areas devastated by the 1970 cyclone already are experiencing food shortages, and unless distribution problems are overcome within the next few months, the problem

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will spread to the traditional food-deficit urban areas.

Famine may occur in some areas.

3. Resistance continues. We do not know how much guerrilla activity there is; it is apparently less than the Indian sponsors of the insurgents would like, but greater and more effective than the Pakistani leaders expected. Enough guerrilla and counter-guerrilla activity goes on to keep surface transport disrupted, to provide Western reporters on the Indian border with visible and continued evidence of armed combat, to make travel outside the cities sometimes risky, to lead to angry Pakistani charges about "Indian sappers and infiltrators", and to make province-wide civil administration difficult, and in some places impossible. This situation is likely to continue for the foreseeable future; the army shows no signs either of acquiring full control or of withdrawing.

4. Apart from conflict between the East Pakistanis and the army, the fighting has taken on ugly ethnic and communal overtones, and many of the area's residents are becoming brutalized. There are two aspects to this; on the one hand, native Bengalis and the million or so "Biharis" (Urdu-speaking Muslim refugees from India) have turned on each other in many places. How many Biharis have been killed by Bengalis and vice versa will never be

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established, but the number runs into the thousands. Pakistani authorities claim that the only atrocities in the area were those perpetrated on the Biharis by the wicked Awami Leaguers and that this was one of the principal reasons for military intervention. This is doubtful, but numerous killings have been substantiated since the fighting began, and the gap between the two communities is now very wide, perhaps irreparable.*

5. More extensive, and -- for the peace of the area -- much more dangerous have been the extensive killings of members of East Bengal's 10 million Hindu minority. There is considerable and convincing evidence that some Pakistani army units have run berserk, shooting up Hindu quarters in the cities and whole villages, indiscriminately murdering men, women and children on a very large

* Probably the most dramatic episode we know of was in Mymensingh, a city of some 125,000 until March 1971. When the fighting began, some 25 or so Punjabi soldiers were killed by the local constabulary; the city then remained quiet for some time under Bengali control. Tensions mounted as air raids began and the army neared. Finally the Bengalis rounded up a number of Biharis, and all males over ten (perhaps a thousand in all) were butchered. The army arrived soon after to find the city deserted. When the news of Mymensingh reached Dacca, most Bengalis fled that city too, at least temporarily, fearing Bihari reprisals. Mymensingh remains abandoned except for some Biharis.

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scale. Islamabad has angrily denied this has happened, and has insisted that it offers full protection to Hindus and Muslims alike. Whatever the real official policy, Pakistani soldiers have almost certainly been encouraged in their extreme actions by the steady stream of anti-Indian, anti-Hindu propaganda put out by the Pakistani authorities, who claim that the trouble is India's fault and that they are only fighting foreign inspired subversive and secessionist plots.

THE REFUGEE PROBLEM

6. These atrocities and uncertainties have led not merely to a heavy exodus from cities occupied by the army but also to a mass flight from East Bengal itself. Beginning about the middle of April, Bengalis began streaming into India. New Delhi claims that some three and a half million have come in and that they continue to cross over at a rate of from 50,000-100,000 a day. No one knows how many may ultimately arrive; some Indians believe that eventually the refugees may total as many as 6-10 million people.

7. No accurate check on these figures is possible, but neutral observers on the scene think these Indian claims are not far off. Many of the refugees, probably most, are Hindus

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but there are very many Muslims as well. The sheer numbers are putting a very heavy burden on the Indian government, which is doing its best to feed them and provide some rudiments of accommodation. But India is hardly affluent or amply provided with food. The refugees are disrupting life in border areas, depressing labor costs, raising food prices, exhausting medical supplies, creating dangerous sanitation problems, occupying all such available buildings as schools and hospitals. Costs for providing them with a bare subsistence may run to several hundred million dollars a year -- a task beyond India's means. In any event, New Delhi wants the refugees to return to East Bengal as soon as possible.

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THE SITUATION IN WEST PAKISTAN

8. Superficially, the situation appears fairly normal in the west wing. But the economy there is in bad shape and getting worse. The east wing formerly served as the principal external market for the west's industries and as an important earner of its hard currency. Its performance in both roles has sharply declined; foreign exchange reserves are greatly depleted; foreign debt repayments are in *de facto* default (they are being made in non-convertible rupees). World Bank representatives have pronounced the situation bleak; special Pakistani envoys are visiting the principal world capitals seeking emergency assistance. Except in the case of China they have had little success.

9. The deteriorating economic conditions hold the seeds of political trouble for the Martial Law Administration (MLA). Military operations in the East reportedly are costing about \$2 million a day, a rate that would approximately double the nation's pre-crisis defense expenditures. Islamabad reportedly is considering some politically risky measures to bring revenues more nearly in line with expenditures, including a pay cut for military and civilian government personnel and higher taxes. Meanwhile, future economic aid commitments from the Free World Consortium -- which accounted

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for over 80 percent of Pakistan's total foreign aid in recent years -- is being withheld pending some resolution of the situation.

10. The MLA continues to rule sternly. Political activity is strictly controlled and the press remains sychophantic and muzzled. There is considerable that is puzzling about the MLA, its principal figures, and particularly about its chief, President Yahya Khan.

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[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

The top figures in the MLA are apparently tough, hard-line generals. Yahya himself may not be the absolute boss, but he has so far been the regime's principal spokesman.

[REDACTED]

it appears that he and his colleagues have, at least on some occasions, been grossly misinformed about military, economic, and political developments throughout Pakistan. Thus many of the assessments of the situation in East Bengal given the President, at least in the early days of the rebellion, mirrored official propaganda rather than the facts. Further,

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[REDACTED]

Evidently prone to

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hearing what he wants to, [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] facing hard facts only when forced to do so, Yahya in his public statements [REDACTED] has shown himself erratic, isolated, and ill-informed.

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11. Yahya seems to have no idea of the realities of the situation in East Bengal or of the extent to which recent events have widened the gulf between East and West Pakistan. He also seems to believe that the former situation can be restored by the army. If he and the other members of the MLA are really oblivious of the genuineness of the eastern desire for autonomy, or of the hatred being engendered by army actions in East Bengal, the prospects are dim that the MLA can do anything but aggravate the situation and make the breakup of the country even more of an eventual certainty than it now is.

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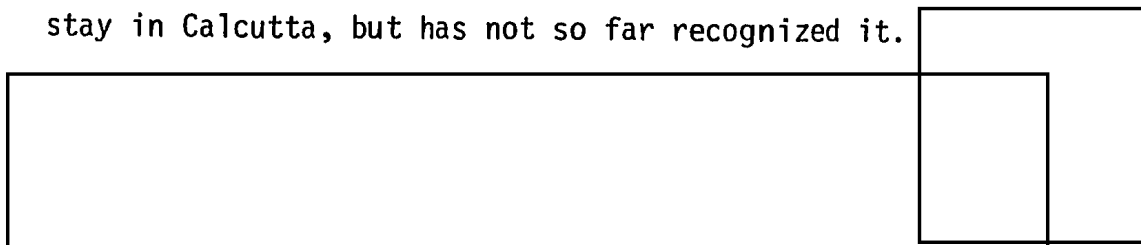
13. Whether Yahya will come anywhere near carrying out his aim is another matter; we are doubtful. There appear to be at least some hard-liners in the inner circle who might seek to frustrate any move towards liberalization even if Yahya himself should try it. Not many Bengali politicians are likely to volunteer to serve at essentially Punjabi behest, though a few might go along. The situation is likely to remain messy, both in economic and political terms, and the military will probably continue to be reluctant to get down from the tiger it mounted.

* *In the December 1970 elections, the Awami League won 167 of East Pakistan's 169 seats in the National Assembly. Only four of those then chosen have declared their support of the present military regime.*

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THE SITUATION IN INDIA

14. The continuing Bengali uprising is causing considerable trauma for the Indians. The cause of Bangla Desh has acquired widespread popular support. The Indian press has given it wide coverage, grossly exaggerating Bengali military successes, describing Punjabi atrocities and so on. Mrs. Gandhi's government has so far exercised some restraint. It permits a government-in-exile to stay in Calcutta, but has not so far recognized it.



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15. But Indian restraint may be wearing thin. Parliament was in recess when the Bengali crisis began on 25 March. It has just reconvened and is already exercising a familiar role: raising the political temperature with intemperate speeches and resolutions, exerting steady demands on the government to take drastic steps. And the government may be more amenable to such suggestions. The refugee problem, even with substantial and forthcoming international assistance, would be formidable; to the Indians it may be becoming intolerable.

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16. Whatever India's forthcoming decisions, they will be principally made by Mrs. Gandhi, whose newly acquired parliamentary majority has given her undisputed leadership in India. Her policies to date have been cautious ones and she has been able to make them stick. But if the crisis atmosphere continues for an extended period, even she will find herself under stronger parliamentary and popular pressures for some kind of forceful action.

PROSPECTS FOR INDO-PAKISTANI HOSTILITIES

17. India and Pakistan are closer to a major war with one another than at any time since 1965. This is not to say that heavy fighting is necessarily imminent or inevitable, but some factors point to a further deterioration in relations: the high pitch of official denunciations by the two governments; the continuing and seemingly increasing clashes between Indian border guards and transgressing Pakistani army units (presumably chasing Bengali guerrillas); growing awareness in India of the atrocities inflicted on Hindus; the frustration and anger among Pakistani officers at India's support of the Bengali cause and its material aid to the "freedom fighters"; and India's belief in its military superiority and ability, if need be, to put an end to Punjabi rule in East Bengal.

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18. There are still, of course, important factors working against another major round. The leaders of the two nations are aware of the great and unpredictable dangers that would result from such a conflict. The Indian army is probably ill-prepared logistically for major operations in the riverine areas of East Bengal. International pressures -- especially from the US, the UK, and the USSR, and the fear of loss of foreign aid -- are working to dampen the danger of a new war. The Pakistani leaders probably know they would lose unless they got major outside, i.e., Chinese help -- and there are no signs of that being forthcoming. In India, however, fears of Chinese intervention are sufficiently real to act as one of several constraints on any decision to fight Pakistan.

19. While the situation carries great potential for a new conflict, there have as yet been none of the slowly escalating clashes between regular military units in Kashmir which preceded the last major Indo-Pakistani conflict. Were these to start, the situation would clearly become more dangerous. Were India to undertake a policy of major reprisals against any real or threatened Pakistani frontier incursions, then action and reaction could lead to a major conflict even though neither side wanted it. To date, both sides have shown great caution on the Kashmiri and Punjabi frontiers.

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20. There remains the question of war breaking out by a deliberate decision by either government. A Pakistani decision to attack India is unlikely, given Pakistan's relative military inferiority. But with the current climate of stress and misinformation which seems to prevail in the MLA, it cannot be ruled out entirely.

21. In the case of India, there are some political and popular pressures for a military move into East Bengal designed to end Pakistani army rule, restore the Awami League to power, and permit the return of the refugees in India. A decision to do so would probably be based on a calculation (compounded of rational assessments, hopes and guesses) that such an operation would be accomplished quickly and would not lead to major fighting in the Punjab. These propositions are open to question; the West Pakistanis would almost certainly put up a fight in East Bengal and probably in the West as well. And despite India's overall superiority, in view of the logistic difficulties India could probably not achieve a quick and easy victory.

THE USSR AND CHINA

22. In their separate ways, both the USSR and China continue to show caution in this situation. Moscow has apparently not

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followed up its earlier reprimand to Yahya with anything stronger. We continue to estimate that the Soviets hope that major conflict can be avoided and are probably exerting their influence in the subcontinent to that end. This may account for their avoiding sharp gestures toward Islamabad. The Chinese, while expressing support for the Pakistani government, and voicing their disapproval of Indian meddling, have also refrained from threatening actions against India. If Indo-Pakistani hostilities should develop, China might engage in more threatening gestures against India, but we would also continue to estimate that China will not risk major military involvement to help bail out West Pakistan.

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